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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

Afghanistan

15 April 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Zbigniew Brzezinski
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan:
Aberration or Symptom?

1. A short time ago we were discussing the implications of the Soviet move into Afghanistan. We asked whether this was an aberration which, when behind us, will see the Soviet Union revert to its previous pattern of behavior; or whether it is a symptom of a new phase of adventuresome policy to which the Kremlin is already committed. Subsequently, I asked our Soviet experts to look at these two possible explanations for Soviet behavior in Afghanistan. They have written the attached paper which I believe is very helpful in putting these two explanations into perspective. [redacted]

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2. It concludes that Soviet behavior in the future will be quite contingent on the conclusions which the Soviet leadership draws from the results of their experience in Afghanistan and US reactions to it. In short, the Soviets are neither committed to returning to detente nor to pursuing an aggressive policy on a global basis. [redacted]

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3. I would only add a personal comment that I would be a bit more categorical than the paper in stating that the Soviet behavior in Afghanistan was not an aberration. I agree that we do not have evidence that the Soviets are firmly committed to continuing as aggressive a policy in the third world as was this Afghan example. Yet, I do believe that the Soviet track record over the past five or six years indicates a definitely greater willingness to probe the limits of our tolerance. "Detente" was not a bar to their greater assertiveness in Angola, Ethiopia, Kampuchea, and Yemen. It need not be so again, even if we return to detente. As the paper concludes, how assertive the Soviets will be in the future will very likely depend upon how "successful" the Soviet leadership views their intervention in Afghanistan to have been. [redacted]

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Attachment

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